

The Impossible Life of Preston J Cole

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Summary: Many people thought Admiral Cole died during the Battle of Psi Serpentis. What if he didn't?

1. Chapter 1

****Okay, I am sorry for posting this, I really shouldn't have but I couldn't help myself. so read it and leave a comment. however if you start going on and on about 'inaccuracies' then i will completely ignore you unless the point is valid. seriously i don't want to read something along the lines of 'What about the shipboard A.I? that would have stopped them.' seriously if i read a comment like that then... well... you're an idiot. no offence but there you go.**

****As i said though, if you have a valid point i will listen to you so if you see something wrong point it out, just nothing to do with the A.I, i know what i'm doing regarding that.****

****I don't own anything.****

*** * ***

><p>Alliance space, September 21, 2169, 14:34 (Earth Time)

****Admiral William Jones****

The Alliance fleet was a formidable sight, two of the large Carriers hung back from the main force, not far enough away to be out of the fight but not close enough to be in the thick of it either. The Flagshipâ€”a Dreadnought class vessel, a massive one kilometre long warship known as the Kilimanjaro. But even this beast of a ship was smaller than the 1.58 kilometre long and blocky wreck with the name printed in large white, if faded, letters; the UNSC Everest. Normally finding a wreck like this in space would mean the Citadel

Council had to be informed and they would then take it and study it without the Alliance's say. This time however the Alliance fleet went into a complete communication blackout. Because it was, in all likelihood a human ship that not only superseded the Asari's very own Flagship, the Destiny Ascension meant the Alliance would have to answer the Council over the ship's origins "which were completely unknown.

Whatever the origins of the massive ship it still scarred Admiral Jones, whatever happened to it would have destroyed his ship several times over and most probably most of his fleet as well. Huge gashes in the ridiculously thick armour revealed the outer most decks; in some parts the gashes were so deep they were dozens of meters in behind the armour. Several things caught his attention though; the blackened engine cones from extreme use and temperature along with the patchwork of what armour was left, the mixture of old and new indicated that the ship had seen a lot of action, so much so that none of the armour plate were thought to be over just a few months old and yet they all showed signs of some heavy fighting. An assortment of weaponry dotted the hull; there were eighty missile tubes, and each one containing enough space for thirty missiles, meaning it was capable of firing 2400 missiles in total, more than his entire fleet combined. It had nearly a hundred 50mm cannons acting as point defence guns with overlapping fields of fire and 105 launch pods for what is assumed to be torpedoes. But the real firepower on that ship came from the large spinal guns, three, THREE, massive guns that ran two thirds the length of the ship, they had an estimated output of 80-100 kilojoules of kinetic energy, more than twice the power of the Alliance's own SSV Everest. What worried the Admiral the most was how quiet the ship was; no running lights and not well anything at all. In fact the only little bit of power they could pick up was small and localised deep within the ship near the engines, away from the outer hull.

His XO walked up to him and saluted before speaking, "Captain Franks is ready to go sir." She spoke with the utter most respect and politeness expected of Alliance Officers.

"Good, tell him he has the green light. After that tell the Einstein and Hawking to double the amount of fighters on patrol, absolutely nothing can leave the system until we are done here." He responded.

"Aye Sir." She snapped off another salute before going off to fulfil her duties. Jones sighed as he looked at the massive ship and wondered what kind of trouble it would bring the Alliance.

* * *

><p>Kodiak Shuttle, en route to the derelict ship, September 21, 2169, 14:45 (Earth Time)

****Captain Oliver Franks****

Captain Oliver Franks sat in the Kodiak shuttle with his eleven man squad. His mission; locate the bridge and download any information still in the ship's databanks and return life-support to the ship. After that they were to find the source of the energy readings the Kilimanjaro had picked up. To his right sat 1st Lieutenant Kelly Martinez, 2nd Lieutenant Jimmy MacCraw and Sergeant James Benetez. On

his left sat Corporal Alexi Petrov, Lance Corporals Felicia Williams and Peter Collins. Along with Privates Eddie Flinch, Steven Crawler, Dmitri Zheng and Ngoc Burgundy, on the other side of the Kodiak near the door. His men were part of the 106th Marine division"some of the most hard assed marines in the Alliance, second only to the N7's.

Looking at one of the displays that were dotted around the troop bay of the shuttle he could see the massive ship getting even bigger, they were heading to one of the only hanger bays still open. As they got closer he took note of the point defence cannons dotted around the hull, each turret would be more than capable of taking out the small shuttle with ease.

"She's been out here awhile, she's colder than Noveria in the winter, hell there aint even a hint of eezo on the ship anymore." The pilot said from his seat at the front.

"Great, a ghost ship, just what I always wanted to search through. Any idea how long she's been out here?" Franks asked.

"None, but here engines are as cold as space and have been for some time, months at least." The pilot replied. "Anyway's, better get ready, we're coming in now. Have fun in there with all the ghosts!" the pilot cracked up before sealing the cockpit shut. Sighing Oliver sealed his helmet shut and turned to his team.

"You heard the man, ready up marines!" Oliver ordered and watched as the team went through one final check before standing up at the ready. Oliver watched as the shuttle entered the hanger bay, it was fairly large, bigger than the one on the Kilimanjaro, but not as big as one on a carrier. The shuttle touched down and the troop bay pressurised before the door opened. The squad piled out, rifles held high and flashlights on, securing the hanger was quickly done simply because it was empty; there was absolutely nothing in there apart from them and the shuttle.

"MacCraw, Williams, Zheng and Burgundy you stay here and keep the shuttle secure, the rest of you are with me, we're going for the bridge. Petrov, you got the schematics?" Oliver said.

"They're rough but da, I have them." The Russian native replied.

"Good, you're on point."

* * *

><p>UNSC Everst, Deck 27, hallway Alpha-7, September 21, 2169, 14:52(Earth Time)

****Corporal Alexi Petrov****

Alexi took point through the ship, something he didn't like very much, mainly because it was up to him to get the doors open, large, heavy bulkheads that were sealed electronically and physically. Simply put; they were a pain in his ass to open. That combined with the expansive darkness of the halls and groaning of the ships superstructure made him nervous, more so than a squad of angry Batarian slavers. Finding their way was easier than they thought,

there were schematics of the ship throughout the deck they were currently on. There was no sign of the ship's crew, the halls were empty, dark, cold and foreboding, something that to Alexi spelt trouble, nothing good ever came out of something like this. Or maybe he had just watched one too many horror vids. Either way he was breathing hard and fast, a consequence of his less than steel nerves.

With the help from the Captain and Martinez they forced the final bulkhead open, revealing the massive bridge of the ship. Inside were two dozen workstations, large tactical displays and massive floor to ceiling monitors. At the centre of it all was a single command chair surrounded by a half dozen monitors. Floating about in the zero gravity were several data pads that were quickly snatched up by the team.

"Alexi, see if you can get the life-support working on this wreck, Flinch, Crawler, cover the hall way, we can't be too careful here. The rest of you see if you can't do something useful." The Captain ordered, the team filtered out amongst various stations, seeing what they could do.

Alexi took one of the primary station near the command chair and booted up his Omni-tool, it took him a while but he managed to interface with the ship board systems and boot up the computers, what he found was a treasure trove of information, the only problem was it was so heavily encrypted he wouldn't be able to get past the encryption for days, maybe even weeks. He left the data banks alone and started booting up the primary generators on the ship, when the readouts came up on the screen in front of him, he was shocked, they were readouts for a powerful Deuterium Core reactor, one more powerful than anything in Alliance space.

"Captain!" Alexi called Captain Franks over, when the officer loomed over his shoulder Alexi pointed to the screen.

"Readouts for a Deuterium Core Reactor, one more powerful than anything in Alliance space, and the design is not one I recognise, it's far more advanced than anything we have like this."

"Understood, make a note of it; we'll pass it on when we're done. What about life support?"

"Bringing it online now Captain." Alexi replied, stabbing at the interface to bring it online.

Once there was air on the bridge the team took off their helmets but kept them close, just in case. Martinez was at one of the other primary stations when she called out.

"Sir, I found something you might like to hear; it's the last outbound transmission from the ship." She said.

"Play it." Franks ordered from the command chair, which he had taken a particular fancy to. She pressed a few buttons and fiddled with her Omni-tool before the message began to play. It was a man with a deep authoritative voice that put Admirals and Generals to shame.

"_Listen to me, Covenant. I am Vice Admiral Preston J. Cole

commanding the human flagship, Everest. You claim to be the holy and glorious inheritors of the universe? I spit on your so-called holiness. You dare judge us unfit? After I have personally sent more than three hundred of your vainglorious ships to hell? After kicking your collective butts off Harvest - not once - but twice? From where I sit, we are the worthy inheritors. You think otherwise, you can come and try to prove me wrong." _ After a slight pause the voice of Vice Admiral Preston Cole spoke again.

"_Is that the best you can do? Watch what one unworthy human can do!"_

The transmission raised more questions; who were the Covenant? Who was Admiral Cole? And what happened? As far as anyone knew there were no Covenant, and certainly not a war with them in which over three hundred enemy ships had been destroyed, that was more than triple the amount of casualties taken during the First Contact War on both sides. Other questions circled through the group such as who was Admiral Cole? What was Harvest?

"All right, enough of that," Captain Franks interrupted, "See if you can't raise the _Kilimanjaro,_ use the damn Comm system on this ship if you have to."

Alexi moved over to what he assumed was the Comm station and tried to activate it, only to get an error message pop up. _Access denied, neural uplink not established. _He tried working round it but nothing he did allowed him access to the station. Thankfully Martinez managed to get through to the Dreadnought via her Omni-tool.

"_Captain, what's your status? We're picking up a massive build-up in energy on the ship." _Admiral Jones said.

"We're fine sir; we just turned the life support on along with other basic systems. The data banks are full of info but they're so heavily encrypted it'd take the best hackers in the galaxy weeks, maybe months to crack it." Franks replied.

"_Understood, I'll send over some more men to help secure the wreck and to start on those encryptions." _Jones replied from the other end of the radio.

"Aye sir, we're about to go check out the mysterious energy readings near the engines."

"_Copy that Captain, good luck."_ And with that the Admiral disconnected the conversation. As Franks got up to move Alexi found something.

"Sir, no need to go looking, I know what it is." He said, the rest of the group looked at him expectantly. He flicked the monitor that showed what he was looking at, causing Franks to look at it.

"Cryo pods, thousands of them, nearly all of them are active." He said slowly.

"The crew are alive? That'd explain the lack of bodies." Martinez said from the station she was looking through.

"Yeah, it would. Tell the Admiral to send over medical teams and a

hell of a lot more marines." Franks ordered. After doing so the team moved back towards the hanger to wait for the reinforcements.

* * *

><p>UNSC Everest, Cryo Bay Alpha-4, September 21, 2169, 15:21,

****Captain Oliver Franks****

There were hundreds of pods in each bay, each one labelled with a number and a name, Oliver had spent his time looking for one man in particular, one Admiral Preston J. Cole. And when he found him Oliver was less than impressed; the man was completely stark naked and looked almost dead. Not a very impressive look. Inside the bay a medical team was standing by ready for him, he decided to thaw out the Admiral first and then the rest of the crew. Other medical teams stood by for the revival of the other crew. Two dozen marines stood guard around the pod, waiting nervously for him to open it.

He gave the order and two tech experts stepped up to the pod, they spent five or so minutes accessing the pod controls before they gave the thumbs up and stepped back. It took some time for the pod to open and wake the man inside. Whatever Oliver was expecting when the man woke up it was not having his boots covered in the most disgusting looking white slime the man coughed up as he fell to the floor, barely able to support himself but when a medical technician went to help the older man simply waved him off without a look.

"Where are my clothes soldiers?" the man wheezed out in between coughs.

"Excuse me?" Oliver couldn't stop the indignant remark. Years later when questioned about this day he would say he regretted the comment.

2. Chapter 2

****Okay, chapter two.****

****Now to address some issues.****

****Philip222; no im not, how powerful can an A.I be if it's been decommissioned?****

****J.E.P 1996; Why would Cole captain the Normandy? that's an insult to him and Captain Anderson, and regarding the name, i have no idea, i got it off modern warfare two lol.****

****Robo Reader 21; first thing; the shuttle doesn't have an official date that it entered service listed so i took the liberty of making it before 2170. Second; your right about the Sergeant and Lance Corporal ranks but still, regarding Oliver, he's not navy, he wouldn't be commanding any ships. Third; why bring this up? no one even mentioned the Council species being present. it won't matter. trust me. Fourth; fair enough about the reactors. Fifth; the Cole protocol dictates that all NAVIGATION data be destroyed, of course it makes sense that Cole would delete everything else as well, but you'll see why he didn't. and regarding the team being 'too english',**

that's simple- i suck at names, i struggle with western names, how would i cope with foreign names as well?**

**Aurora Halsey; At 1.518 km long the Everest is still larger than the Destiny Ascension, after all the Dreadnought class of ships range from 800-1000 meters long, the Ascension would be at most 1250 meters- 1300 meters long, it's taller than it is long, seriously, the tower/tail on that thing his ridiculously huge. **

So, yeah, i'm going to take this along a slightly darker path than my other stories, i really hope my writing gives off that impression. if not, well it goes to show i need more practice in that area. leave a review and what not, and enjoy!

* * *

><p>UNSC Everest, Cryo Bay Alpha-4, September 21, 2169, 15:25,

Preston Cole hated a great deal of things. The Covenant being number one on the list, a bit further down the list was people who didn't listen to what he'd said. He had no time for insolent people who didn't listen, they slowed him down. Of course very few people didn't listen to him; after all he was _the_ Admiral Cole, bane of the Covenant and a hero to the UNSC, but when the younger man had replied with 'excuse me?' instead of 'here sir,' he stopped coughing up the bronchial surfactant and looked up, nearly two dozen guards in unfamiliar armour wielding unfamiliar weapons, looking up from the boots he was coughing on he saw the face of a man he had seen plenty of times as a child growing up on the farm. His mother had shown him old photos of this man, this impossible man.

Cole stood to his full height and frowned, these people stood a good few inches smaller than him, the soldiers tensed and some raised their weapons. Cole ignored them. Some of the humans in what was to him strange clothing glared at him, some of the women looked away and blushed and some younger men coughed and turned away. They obviously weren't comfortable with his state of undress. Looking at the impossible man straight in the eye Cole repeated himself in a cold, calculated tone.

"I said where are my clothes, marine."

"Do I look like a maid to you?" the marine replied. Cole sneered at the man and moved to a small cabinet to retrieve a towel to clean himself up with.

"Stop what you're doing." The man ordered but Cole ignored him and started to put his uniform on.

"You're not here to rescue me or my crew and you're not rebels. Judging from the guns you're going to capture me, nothing I can do to stop it, but I'm not being marched through your ship with no clothes on son." Cole replied. Once he was done he looked back at the unfamiliar men and women, giving them the majority of his attention, the rest of him was thinking about how to escape, how to make sure everything from the ships memory banks were wiped, thankfully all navigational data had been deleted.

Two men moved forward to put restraints on his wrists but Cole shot

them a glare. There was no way he was going to be marched about with his wrists in handcuffs.

XX

**UNSC Everest, Cryo Bay Alpha-4, September 21, 2169,
15:28,**

Oliver was rather stunned at the man's attitude; he simply ignored the dozen rifles being pointed at him and took control of the room without even trying. All while he was naked. But the uniform he wore, it was damn impressive; Oliver hadn't seen that many medals and ribbons on one chest before, nor what they stood for. They certainly weren't Alliance or Council standard.

The dark grey uniform was fairly simple in itself but the with the medals and campaign ribbons along with three worn silver stars on the shoulders and four golden bars on the cuffs and neck, it was better looking than an Alliance Naval officers uniform. Combined with the man's demeanour it was easy to see why he was leading the crew.

"I'll go with you but you leave my crew alone, leave them to sleep. They've earned it." The Admiral said in a tone that left no room for argument.

XX

The Alliance "Dreadnought" was a lot smaller than he expected, but more pleasing to the eye than his own. The Everest looked more of her role as a war ship whereas the Alliance ships had an almost softer, more peaceful look. Although they did retain a certain angular design that he recognised and appreciated. The inside of the ship was the same, colourful and aesthetically pleasing design, it made him almost sick to see money was being spent on trivial little things like that when the money could be better spent on more important things, like cruisers.

The crew of the strangely designed ship stopped to stare as he was marched through the small corridors of the ship by the soldiers in ceramic plated armour. After all he wore a strange uniform and kept his head high and wrists free. Some of the younger sailors saluted on reflex at his rank before they were reminded he wasn't _their_ Admiral.

After receiving orders from whomever their CO was the marines took him to the ships infirmary, despite the fact that he was perfectly fine, if a little annoyed that his plan hadn't worked out exactly. Of course that wasn't anyone's fault, Slip-space was unpredictable at the best of times, inside an exploding Brown Dwarf? Who knew what would have happened. The infirmary was surprisingly small for a vessel this size, only a couple dozen beds lined the walls and there were only a few medical technicians milling about the place, keeping the room clean. He was led into an isolation chamber before the clear door was closed and he was left by himself. He pondered his unique situation, he was quite frankly a prisoner, help by an unknown fraction of humans with an unknown amount of power and influence. But of course there was nothing new there, humans had always been fighting one another since the dawn of time. The question on his mind was; would he be fighting these humans? As he had the Insurrectionist

movement. Or would he decide to help them, their military, as strong as its outwards appearance is, he noticed cracks in the armour so to speak. The crew of this ship was green. Very green. They may know what their doing in a technical and metaphorical state but they hadn't seen war, or any engagement, if the air of superiority around them and the gleams in their eyes said anything. Maybe he would do neither, just take his ship, his crew and leave. Find a small world or moon somewhere and set up a small colony of their own. That had been the plan to begin with.

After some time alone the door to the room opened up, revealing two heavily armed guards, and two people in a blue dress uniform. One was a younger female with dark hair and green eyes while the other was an older man, his face was rugged with age, his eyes lacked the spark the rest of the crew had, he had seen combat. He'd seen enough people die in the cold vacuum of space. His uniform was much more ornate than the younger woman's, gold trimmings and a maroon patch over the shoulders and medals and campaign ribbons decorated his chest. He looked tough but Cole saw a hint of recognition, he saw that Cole was like him, an Admiral, someone who led the fleets. The woman though was Cole's worry. The walk, the posture, the data tablet in hand, the impeccably clean uniform, she was a spook through and through. But there was something about her, something he couldn't put a finger on...

The woman entered the quarantine room and sat at the small table and motioned for Cole to do the same. He stayed put and shot her a dark glare.

"What's your name? For the record." she said, her voice was disturbingly familiar.

"Vice Admiral Cole, Preston J. UNSC Service Number 03956-26127-PC, Commander of the UNSC Everest." he replied. His voice was rock solid and caused the woman to look up from her data pad, surprise was clear in her eye's. Had she expected him to say something different? Did she think he was a delusional man with a fancy uniform?

"What were you doing on that ship?" she asked, her voice was unwavering. Cole met her gaze and replied with a single word.

"Fighting."

"And what were you fighting?" she asked, she shot a quick glance to the older man.

"A war." Cole dead-panned. There was no need to sugar coat it. She cleared her throat and turned to the man.

"Admiral," so he was an Admiral, "Can you give us a moment please? And turn off all ship board monitoring devices in this section please." she asked although it came out more like an order. The Admiral looked between Cole and the woman before nodding, an unhappy look on his face.

"Fine Lieutenant Castilla, but the guards stay." he replied with finality after casting Cole another look. He left the room, the guards failed to salute as he left. He was muttering something about 'Intelligence types.' Cole raised an eyebrow, this interrogation had

gotten _very_ interesting. No one said anything for several minutes until a small beep emanated from the Lieutenant's arm. After that, the Lieutenant's personality seemed to change in a simple second.

"So, _you're _the Preston Cole my mother told me about?" the Lieutenant asked. Cole failed to hide his surprise. "Good, we need to move, now. Think you can access the _Everest'_s systems remotely?" she said, offering the data pad. She went to move but Cole grabbed her arm in a vice like grip, the guards tensed but didn't raise their weapons.

"What in Bloody Elisa's name id going on?" he demanded, Lieutenant seemed shocked.

"Isn't it obvious? Were getting you out of here. Dad."

3. Chapter 3

A/N; Okay first off I want to apologize for taking so long with this update but I have my reasons. A couple people were worried about this being a story where the UNSC becomes the Alliance. That has most definitely not the case here, it get's explained in this chapter a little bit.

** Now Review reply time.**

**JonHarper- My apologies about that, I don't have anything against the Alliance, and if you didn't like the way I portrayed them in the last two chapters, you won't here either, BUT the reason for the 'description' in this chapter is because it's from a point of view, a biased point of view. **

philip222- At first I thought you might just be plain silly, now I see your just trolling. I mean, really? You honestly expected me to believe you?

Eipok- Okay, I'll take what you said to heart, I deserved that little bashing off of you. I hope this chapter explains it all a little bit better.

I really hope this chapter clears things up a little. So, enjoy it and review about it.

* * *

><p>SSV Kilimanjaro, Alliance Space, 16:22, September 21, 2169**

Cole recoiled as though he were burnt, the frown on his face deepened as his grip on the girl tightened. The two guards shared a look, debating whether or not to intervene.

"What. The. HELL! Do you men by _that?"_ he growled out, his voice just as dark as his eyes. His knuckles were turning white as the grip on the woman's arm tightened even more. From the look in her eyes he could tell she was starting to panic.

"What? You think the _Everest _was the only one that got totally

fucked up in Slip-Space? Well news flash Preston it wasn't. That stunt you pulled managed to drag the Bellicose with it. Only we landed on a planet, not in deep space." she said, her tone sounded slightly bitter, "Don't look so surprised Preston, you made a jump inside an exploding Brown Dwarf. What the hell did you think would happen? You're lucky you weren't vaporized! Or worse!" she spat out.

"Look, you can stay here with the damned Alliance or you can come with us. The Alliance would probably take your ship, your crew and you'll probably never see the light of day again if they get their hands on you. You're lucky I was even attached to this fleet to begin with. We have our own colony, somewhere out of the way and free from every government in the galaxy. Human or alien." she said after a small breath.

"What do you mean alien?" Cole said, his voice getting dangerously dark.

"Yeah, aliens, just as many as the damn Covenant only they have humanity wrapped around their little finger! The Alliance is only allowed six ships over 800 meters long because of the aliens. And the Alliance is okay with it, they would sell your secrets to the aliens just to get more favour with them." she replied.

"What year is it? On Earth." Cole questioned, his brain working overtime to make sense of everything, and trying to decide whether she was lying.

"According to Earth, this Earth, 2169." Cole tightened his hand around her arm so tight that the blood was starting to stop flowing, causing her even more discomfort.

"Impossible. We were still in the Sol system, fighting the Interplanetary war at the time, not making friends with aliens." he rebuked.

"Yeah well, why don't we find out? You can stay and watch as they take everything to advance themselves. Make them better in the eyes of the aliens. Could you watch that? Could you watch as they gave away UNSC secretes to the aliens and make sure you were never mentioned, you never existed, hell they'd probably take the Everest as their own, giver her a new paint job and give her a horrible name."

Cole was at an impasse, he couldn't tell if the woman was lying, but nor could he tell if she was telling the truth. Could he take the risk if she was right? Could he if she wasn't? He could go and live a peaceful life on an isolated colony somewhere, or he could stay, and maybe help protect Earth and all her colonies here, after all, he did fail the outer colonies. He was old and tired of war, was he able to help the 'Alliance'? Did he want to?

"The aliens know the location of Earth, because the Alliance was too weak willed to stand up to them. It's too late to save the Alliance, the aliens already control them." she whispered and Cole's grip lessened before his hand fell to his side.

"Even if I wanted to go, and that's a pretty big if, the Everest is no shape to go anywhere. Her Slip-Space drive is fried,

it requires a new drive, and _if_ you're right, these people don't have one. We couldn't leave the system." Cole replied quietly.

"Lucky for you, I'm a good planner." she replied with a small smile. She offered him the COM pad, it was a standard UNSC COM pad, easy enough to use to interface with the _Everest_'s systems.

"And how exactly do you plan to get the _Everest_ away from a fully armed and mobilized fleet?" Cole questioned, his fingers hovering millimetres from the touch-sensitive screen.

"Simple; we grab the _Everest_ and go. Using some of the UNSC tech we... _liberated_, such as a UNSC Repair and Refit station. One of the only things big enough to carry the _Everest_ through Slip-Space." she replied.

"You mean stole, taken from abandoned sites and ransacked graveyards of the millions of men and woman that gave their lives to defend humanity? That's really _liberated._" Cole sneered. He personally had left behind those resources and had fought in those battles. They weren't something to be ransacked by rebels.

"Details, plus it's not like _I_ had anything to do with it." she replied, the triumphant grin still plastered on her face. Cole snorted but said nothing.

"Even if that worked, how do you suppose we get past the _entire_ _crew of this ship?" he questioned.

"We make a run for it in the panic." she said simply and with a slight shrug of her shoulders. Just then the room darkened and an emergency klaxon started to blare.

"_All hand to battle-stations, I repeat, all hand to battle-stations._" The Admiral reported over the ship's intercom. The ship started to shake as something impacted the hull, and then a deep rumbling sound as the engines started to move the ship and its weapons started to fire. Cole frowned, he didn't realise this was her plan, to kill innocent people? The guards moved with them as they moved through the ship, the crew were frantically trying to stop any fires and keep the ship in one piece. They were heading for an escape pod, or even better yet a shuttle.

"Better strap in, it might get bumpy!" she called out as the shuttle's engines started. Lifting it off the hanger floor and propelling it out the door, the hanger crew too busy to notice. Cole looked at the small display as they left the ship, expecting to see two fleets firing in each other, only there were none, only the Alliance fleet, firing away at nothing, Their back turned on the _Everest_, protecting it from an invisible threat.

"I hacked their training subroutines, made the entire fleet think they were under attack from hostile forces. The fires were controlled. There was no real danger, no one is dead. But because they're distracted we can escape." Castilla said, she was looking at him now. "We're not heartless monsters the UNSC portrayed us to be." she said softly before turning back to the controls. As she steered the shuttle into the main hanger on the _Everest_ he saw two squads of ODSTs and the Alliance personnel that had been left on board to

exam the ship. As they landed one of the ODSTs stepped forward, meeting him at the shuttle door. Cole stepped out the shuttle and greeted the Captain with a nod.

"Captain, I hope my ship is secure. It looks like things are going to pan out after all." Cole said, walking past the marine Captain and towards the door from the hanger.

"Yes sir, but what about the ah... guests?" the Captain asked. Cole stopped mid-stride and looked back towards the Alliance scientists and marines who had been taken by surprise by the ODSTs.

"Castilla, send those people back to their ship before the Alliance figures out what we're doing." she nodded and got the marines to help move them onto the shuttle. The battle hardened ODSTs were at first hesitant to take her orders but one quick look from Cole set them to work.

Cole moved towards the bridge of the _Everest_. _The crew had been woken up and were moving about to their stations, Marines were securing the ship and Naval personal were bringing it back up to operational status, or as close to it as possible. The bridge itself seemed almost empty despite the thirty officers and crewmen working at their stations. _Where were the rest of the bridge crew?_ Whether or not he'd need them was still to be seen, he didn't have a fleet to coordinate at the moment so that certainly lessened the workload of the bridge crew.

"Admiral, sir!" His First Officer called out. "Unknown Fleet has their backs to us sir, orders?"

"Pull away at maximum burn, I don't know how long it'll be before they figure out what's happening." Cole replied.

"Aye, aye, sir! Helm, take us way at maximum burn away from the fleet and planet." The First Officer replied.

"We have a contact slipping in, sir. It's a repair and refit station,"

"Dock with it. That's our ride out of here." Cole said. His mouth was dry, he wasn't sure if what he was doing was the right thing to do, for him or his crew but it was too late to back out now. His XO gave him a funny look but the order was followed.

"Sir, the fleet is turning to face us! They must have figured out what ever you did." A Lieutenant cried out. Cole let out a silent curse.

"Get us docked with the Station and hook up our generator with theirs. Dump all power into their Slip-Space drives." He barked and the crew complied without question, he had led them for nearly twenty years against the Covenant, he had won all of his battles, sometimes at the cost of far too many people but he still won.

The small Corvette class ships in the Alliance Fleet were surprisingly quick, they were more like fighters than Corvettes, but the larger ships, the Frigates were slower than a UNSC Frigate but they were still quick but the largest ship in the fleet, the Cruiser, was a joke, hardly able to keep up with the rest of the fleet. It was

slow and cumbersome, hardly worth the cost to put it in space. Cole frowned, if speed and manoeuvrability weren't it's strong points it mean that the creators were confident enough in it's fire power and armour that it wouldn't need to out run anything or out manoeuvre it.

"Sir, the Cruiser is preparing to fire!" the Lieutenant at the sensor station reported.

"We're hooked in and dumping all power into the drive, ready to jump in one minute." His XO called out.

"Comms, send a message over to the Cruiser, text only. Tell them I'm doing what's necessary to protect my crew, we don't want anything to do with them or anyone else." Cole said, avoiding the word aliens, his crew might just flip if they found out. When they find out, it'll be inevitable, they'll find out eventually.

"Message sent, sir." The Lieutenant said. Cole nodded at the young woman and continued to look at the view screen that showed the Alliance ship. It's broadside bristling with weapons, all aimed at the _Everest_, but not firing.

"Slip-Space drive is fully charged sir, the station and _Everest_ is ready to jump."

"Do it, jump." Cole said, the deck beneath him lurched as the two ships moved and opened a portal into Slip-Space, the Alliance fleet opened fire too little too late. The _Everest_ was gone.

4. Chapter 4

**Okay, so its been along time since I've uploaded anything, especially an update to this story. But, looking back over my previous work and re-reading reviews inspired me again. I don't know what'll be updated next, or when. Hopefully soon. **

In the mean time, read this and review it. I can't improve without feed back.

* * *

><p>Deep Space, Unidentified Star System, 2169 (Alliance Calendar)

There were many factions of humanity, the largest and most politically powerful was the Alliance, funded by the most powerful and wealthiest nations on Earth before First Contact, an event which stripped all Earth Governments of their power. The Alliance strove for peace with the galaxy, looking to be equals with the other races, looking to have a say in how things are done. The Alliance had ships, a strong military and the political advantage, as far as the rest of the galaxy was concerned the Alliance was the only human faction that mattered. Any other was a threat to their power.

Cerberus, the enigmatic, dark, shadowy organisation that sought to reform the Alliance into a stronger, more independent faction, one that didn't need the Citadel Council and the underhanded ploys to keep the three main races in power. One where Humanity ruled, not

aliens. It was considered a racist, bigoted view and Cerberus was branded as terrorists and if an operative was discovered, they were treated as such. Cerberus was a survivalist organisation, as far as its leader, the mysterious Illusive Man, humanity needed power on the galactic stage if it was to survive and the Systems Alliance was too weak willed, too caught up in public opinion and law to be effective.

Jack Harper, a name forgotten by the galaxy as a mere foot note in highly classified reports, created Cerberus, to help humanity, not overthrow it as the Systems Alliance so claimed. His main base of operations, his home was a station orbiting a dying star whose light cast a grim shadow into his private sanctum at the heart of the station.

"You took a risk," he said, looking at the myriad of holographic displays in front of him, studying each one in absolute detail. Almost but not quite ignoring the holographic communication with the person behind him. "You sacrificed your cover and everything we worked for. Everything you worked for."

He was calm, despite his barely contained anger at the perceived failure. He wasn't one to shout, instead he remained calm, in control.

"It was necessary, the Everest was highly advanced, more so than anything the Alliance has to offer. They would have gutted her and sold everything they found to the Council," The woman said with a frown. "That ship, its crew, it deserved more than what the Alliance would have done to them. That ship is a power house we need to return to its full potential. It would be the most powerful vessel in the known galaxy and it would be ours. Is that a failure?"

The Illusive man, as he was known by now, sighed and turned to face the woman. He took a long drag on the cigarette in his hand, a decent and human made, real Tabaco cigarette. Not one of the many, alien made healthier alternatives.

"No, it isn't. Not in that sense anyway. But all the work we invested in infiltrating Alliance Intelligence has now been wasted. It took years to get you where you were and now after that stunt you pulled they'll be putting the entire division under investigation. Chances are we won't be able to get another operative in that position for quite some time. If ever."

"It was a necessary action worth the sacrifice. The technology aboard the Everest will benefit us all in the long run."

"Only if you can convince its captain to aid our cause. Something he's unwilling to do at the moment."

"Don't worry. I know just the person to get through to him." The woman said before her hologram disappeared from sight. The Illusive Man sat down again, resisting the urge to verbally vent his frustration. Yes, the Everest was decades more advanced than the Bellicose and would benefit the movement but there was a plan, a grand scheme, one that transcended here and now, that would last decades and it was all in jeopardy now. That's what happened when you trusted outside sources. Even those that backed your organisation with more than just money but man power and materials as well. Even

highly advanced sciences that was decades, if not centuries ahead of the council.

He just hoped this setback was a minor inconvenience in the long run. A mere foot note on galactic history a century from now.

XX

Deep in the Traverse, away from prying eyes was a human colony. Highly industrialised, towering cities that linked to space with massive orbital elevators that provided a quick, cheap way to get into orbit, and vast rolling grasslands used for agriculture to feed the millions of people on the planet. Massive orbital stations, docks, defence platforms and ship yards filled the void above the world.

Having recently been moved there the _Everest _rested at one of the many docks, engineers and workers went about refitting the ship, replacing the massive chunks of armour and rearming the empty guns and missile tubes. Aboard the largest station Preston Cole looked down at the planet below, surprised at how industrialised these people were. How many people had his actions at Psi Serpentis effected? How many lives did he ruin with that action?

"Beautiful, isn't it?" She wasn't wrong. The view was beautiful. Castilla moved stand next him. This wasn't the same woman that had rescued him from the Alliance. Although part of him wondered if he really did need rescuing. He had yet to see if the Alliance was as bad as the young lady had claimed back on the dreadnought. "It's been a while Preston, hasn't it?"

"Nearly forty years since we last saw each other face to face. Psi Serpentis doesn't really count now does it?" He turned to face her, despite the age that showed on her face he could still see the young bar maid and brilliant nuclear engineer he had met on Roost decades ago. Long before the Covenant.

"So it has," Lyrenne said with a slight laugh. Her once dark hair was now streaked with grey, much like his own. "Nice move, by the way, with Viperidae. Although more than a few ships were caught in the resulting shockwave. Most of us ended up here about a decade ago. I guess there are things about slip space we will never understand."

Cole snorted in response. This had never been his intention. It had, sort of. Yes he planned on retreating somewhere out of the way with Lyrenne but in _his _universe. If such a thing could be believed. And now he was an escapee that had meet his own great grandfather and in a particular twist of fate was now, technically, his enemy.

"How many?" he asked.

"In total? Around four and half thousand. That population increased exponentially once we settled on the planet and combined with some of our more recent _allies_, I use that term lightly- we've had a serious influx of people and native technology. Now it's just shy of a hundred million. Most of them came from this universe."

"What about these allies of yours?"

"They're a bit extreme, even for me. But they're good at helping us. We help them in return. In fact that's what Lyra was doing when she came across the _Everest."_

"She was spying for them?" he questioned.

"Yes and no. She was spying for us. We needed to know what the Alliance knew but didn't want us to know. We merely kept our friends in the loop."

"And just who are these people?" Cole asked.

"They call themselves Cerberus. A renegade faction looking to make humanity a super power on the galactic stage. If not the only one. According to the Systems Alliance, the primary human power in the galaxy, Cerberus is nothing more than a bunch of xenophobic terrorists. They are so much more than that, I don't trust them to be honest, but we need their help if we're to survive as an independent world for the moment."

"Lyra, she said something about aliens controlling humans, what about that?" Cole asked, unsure.

"She's a bit enthralled with Cerberus propaganda, the Council, from what I've observed doesn't so much as control the Alliance, merely throws its weight around to make sure the Alliance conforms to its way of thinking. It's nothing more than a political game. Not some racist power play. When we get to the Citadel I'll show you what I mean. It'll be easier for you to understand." Lyrenne said, pushing herself away from the window and motioning Preston, her one time lover and father of her only child, to follow her.

They walked through the station, heading towards a re-converted passenger ship. The class of ship had originally been used to transport people between colonies before the Insurrectionists had gotten a hold of it and converted it into an improvised warship. Sometime after they arrived here in this twisted reality they had reconverted it into a cruise ship. It looked better that way, Preston thought, not that he'd seen many civilian ships up close. Only as retreating dots on tactical displays during intense engagements with the Covenant.

"What do you mean we're going to the Citadel? What in bloody Elisa is the Citadel?"

"The Citadel is incredible. A massive space station where all the civilisations trade and talk politics. Where they mingle and live side by side. Humans walk with and talk with aliens. Some even live with aliens. And plus, I thought you might like to see what you managed to escape from."

Entering the cruise ship she led him to a private quarters, away from the rest of the people aboard. An hour later he felt the ship lurch as the magnetic clamps holding it in place disengaged and released the ship. Moments later they were away. Preston intended to use this time to talk to Lyrenne, get to know as much as possible. She, had other ideas.

****Arcturus Station, Alliance High Command, 2169 (Alliance Calendar)****

Admiral Jones stood straight and tall, his hands rested behind his back, his right hand gripped his left wrist and a grip so tight his knuckles turned white, the only sign of his frustration. Before him stood the Admiralty, the highest members of Parliament and dozens of other officials.

"Horatio Jones, you served as the Commanding Officer of the Fourth Fleet, is that correct?" one of the politicians asked.

"Yes, that is correct." Jones replied.

"And during your last deployment your fleet discovered something, did it not?" another person asked. The other Admirals just looked on, their faces devoid of emotions.

"Yes."

"What did you find?"

"A ship, of human origin that was greater in size and fire power than any other known vessel. Its markings weren't that of a Cerberus ship or those of a lost sleeper ship sent out decades ago." Jones replied. He knew what was happening. He'd let something the Alliance wanted slip through his grasp and now he was being blamed as the reason for the failure.

"If it wasn't Alliance or Cerberus how do you know it was human?" An Admiral spoke up.

"The nameplate was written in English and its crew was human. In fact, all the displays accessed by the marines were also in English." Jones said tersely. This was quickly getting very tiring.

"And the ship was disabled, correct? That is after all why it was out there." Someone else said. There were a lot of names and faces he didn't know.

"We believed so however after we brought aboard the Captain of the ship and during the interrogation by an Alliance _Intelligence _Officer, it was quickly brought back into action. At which point the training subroutines in the fleets VI network activated, as it was not scheduled I assumed, incorrectly, that we were under attack. It was only when our fighters failed to spot any ships visually and reported back that I realised what happened, by which point the Captain, _Intelligence _Officer had escaped back to the ship which was already moving away."

There was a moment of silent disbelief before there was an uproar from nearly everyone in the room. Only the Admiralty and Prime Minister remained silent. And it was the Prime Minister that brought everyone else back into line.

"Admirals," he said. "I think you know what has to be done here. I've heard enough. I want the report on my desk as soon as possible. I'll leave you to it." With that he left, followed by everyone except the Admirals who had barely spoken throughout the ordeal.

"What happened was a gross failure in leadership, your actions caused not only the escape of an extremely dangerous warship as well as a Cerberus spy who had access to highly classified reports. And it is for this reason you are to be relieved of duty, effective immediately." Admiral Tharib, Commander of the Alliance Military now that Jon Grissom had retired, said. Tharib had been a friend to Jones during their early careers but times had changed. Jones realised, although he was sure if hadn't been for their friendship the punishment would have been a lot worse.

His old friend had done him a favour. One he would probably not be able to repay.

XX

****The Citadel, Presidium, 2169 (Alliance Calendar)****

The Citadel was massive, larger than any station Preston had seen before and watching from the small café that rested on a balcony overlooking the massive lake and shopping district, Cole noticed how different everything was. Humans walked side by side with aliens, talking, laughing, and acting like there had never been conflict between them. Which there had been, he'd read about the conflict and he couldn't decide if he was disgusted at how quickly the Alliance forgave the turian aggressors or if he was impressed by how it was all being treated as the past. He saw turian shopkeepers serve human customers without any contempt and vice-versa.

"It's impressive, isn't it?" Lyrenne said, sitting down next to him. He felt strange outside of his uniform. Wearing the clothes of an everyday man. He was, after all trying to blend in.

"Yes, very. But why exactly are we here?" he said, shifting his gaze from the crowd around him to the former rebel leader.

"Looks peaceful doesn't it? Man side by side with aliens. We have an embassy, we have some say in how things are done in the galaxy," she said, taking a sip from her drink. "But look closely, and you'll see things aren't as good as they'd have you believe." She finished by pointing at two turian C-SEC officers harassing a man over what seemed to be nothing.

"Then there's our embassy. It's not even ours. We have to share it with the Elcor and Volas. An embassy is meant to be a sovereign nation's land, not something to be shared by three different by species." He looked on as the turians moved on from the man, having done nothing more than verbally harass and perform an unnecessary pat down and search.

He could see what she was saying, sure, but was it really that bad? If given enough time could things change without any extreme movements? Could they really risk it not changing? Even if he decided to help with what he knew Lyrenne was about to propose, could he really do anything? One battle scarred ship, tired and weary crew was hardly enough to change an entire political agenda.

"We need to fight to bring equality to the galaxy, Preston." She said softly. "Not just for humans, I don't support that idea, but for everyone. Why should Humans, Volas, Elcor, Hanar and Drell. Why should we all be considered second class citizens, relying on the

Asari, Salarrians and Turians for everything and letting them make all the decisions? Hmm?"

"Even if I agreed, you really think you can do something? Change the galaxy?" he asked. He was old, seventy two years old and he was tired of fighting.

"Yes, we can. We have a plan. It'll take a while to implement in its entirety but we're confident it'll work. Cerberus is just a means to the end. For now we need them, when we don't we'll cut them loose. You have no idea how many people, humans or not, are ready to fight and die for equality. And I hate the UNSC as much as the next colonist but at least it was independent, had some fight in it. We're going to replace the Alliance, replace the council and create a galactic civilisation like no other."

"And what about those who refuse to accept the changes you have planned? And why should I care about some alien species I don't know anything about? What about the Covenant? You remember that? If we start something like what you're planning we could very well create the next Covenant."

"We'll deal with them, when the time comes. And why should you care? Because, Preston, just because they didn't evolve on Earth doesn't mean they don't have the same rights as we do, it doesn't mean they don't deserve equality, a say in how their lives are run. They're more human than you think." She finished. It was a hard choice. He really didn't know what to say. What to do. The type of war she was planning wasn't going to be fought with ships and weapons, but political manoeuvring and putting the right people in the right place at the right time. It was shadow war.

"And how do you think I could help? I'm just one man Lyrenne." She smiled, knowing she had him hooked.

"First, we need to remove a few trouble makers from the galaxy." She said with a ferocious grin. "To do that, we'll need a ship, a brilliant Commander and troops the galaxy has never seen before."

End
file.